

Hit by a car

My mom used to say that she didn't worry about her youngest son because she thought I had angels with me at all times. My memory is that she said "Steve has angels up his butt", although I can't guarantee that. She was a real "Southern Bell", born in 1917 in Mississippi, so even though she might have thought it, I doubt she would've said it out loud. Anyway, this was one of those times.

I was six years old and riding back home after cruising around town on my Schwinn bicycle. I was flying down the slight hill on Baker Street, peddling past Atkins Dry Cleaners, and I cruised right through the stop sign at the bottom of the hill. In my defense, there was another little hill ahead that I had to climb and I didn't want to lose my momentum. I never saw the car coming up Fourth Avenue.

Danny McWhorter was a junior at Mount Dora High, and at 16 years old, a fairly new driver, but there was nothing he could have done. The bumper of his '46 Chevy just barely caught my rear fender and I went flying through the air. I landed flat on my back on a little patch of grass between the road and the sidewalk. That in itself was a miracle, because in 1963 nobody had a bicycle helmet.

Danny jumped out and ran over to see if I was still alive and quickly realized he had almost killed not just any kid, but Buster Williams' son. My dad was well known from being on the county school board, having been a scoutmaster, plus I had two older brothers that Danny also knew. It was a small town.

I didn't realize it at the moment, but I had the wind knocked out of me and it felt as if I couldn't breathe. Miracle number two is that all this happened about 100 feet from my doctor's office, so Danny flew down the street in a panic, quickly followed by Dr. Montgomery running back towards me. After seeing that my limbs were in the proper place and that I was not gushing blood, he grabbed me by the belt and lifted me up in the air. To my great relief, this filled my lungs with oxygen and I realized I was going to live. Dr. Montgomery had learned that trick, and performed it many times, because he was the official doctor for our high school football team and was always on the sidelines of every home football game.

An x-ray showed that I just had some cracked ribs and needed to wear a support around my chest until they healed. I was a little disappointed that I didn't require a cast that I could show off to my friends.

If an inch more of the bicycle had been hit ...

If I had landed on the pavement ...

If, if, if ...

But the “ifs” didn't happen and I'm still here to tell the story.

The next time I came down that hill on my bicycle you can be sure I stopped at the bottom.



July, 1969, seven years later and still riding